Good Friday Apr 9 1909

My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken me!

Matt 27- 46
Mark 15- 34

Not too much should be made of these words, which may however little mean more than a cry coming from the delirium of pain. They are not words of the great Sufferers own: but only a quotation from one of the penitential Psalms. In the bewilderment and agony of those hours upon the cross it is not strange that he should have taken them upon his lips.

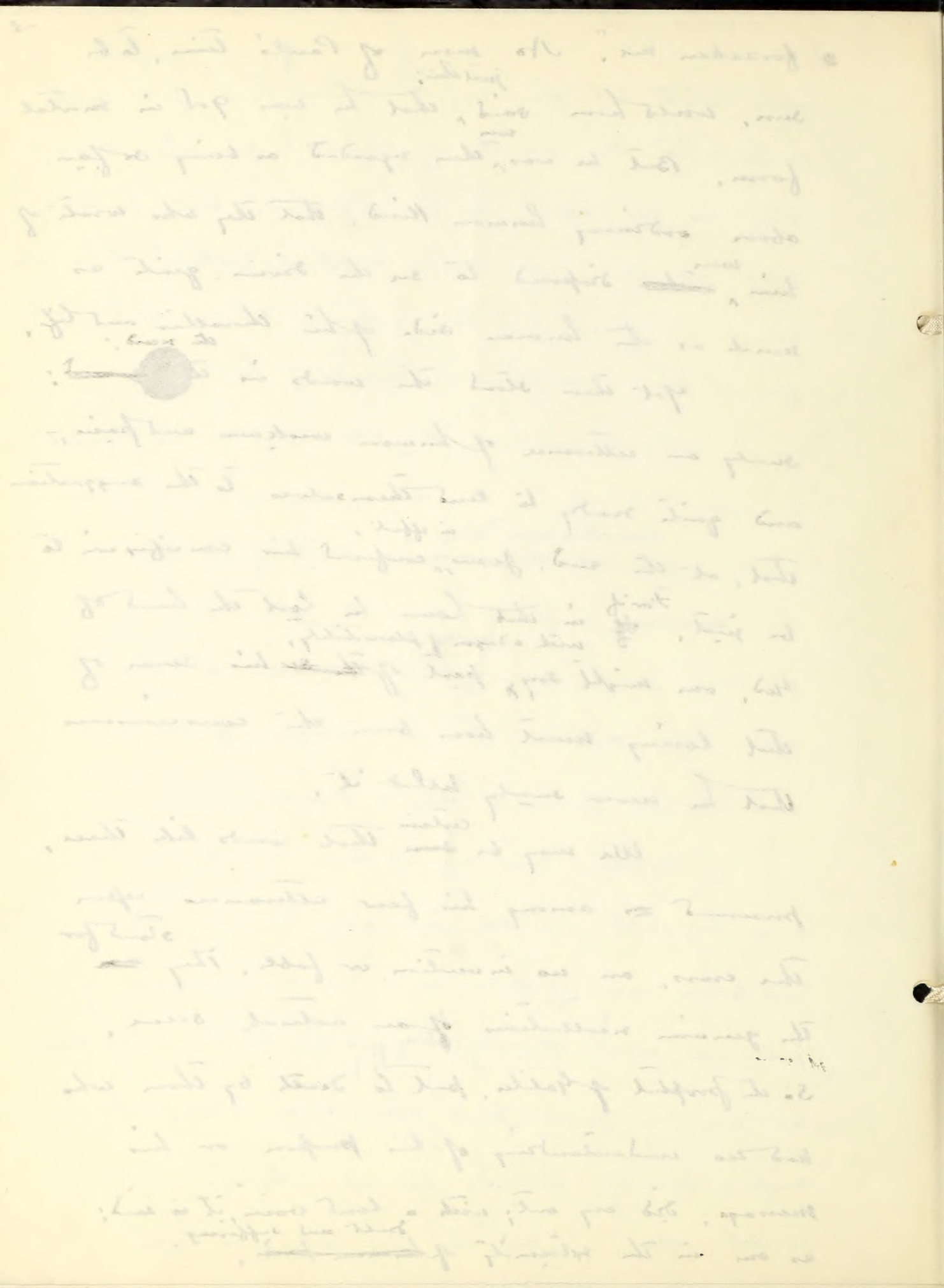
And yet not too little should be made of them. They stand among those fragments of knowledge that we possess about this wonderful life; each one of which fragments is of priceless worth. In themselves they must mean something: and they constitute one of those unmistakable touches of genuineness which, here and there, stamp the human recollections, out of which our Gospels were

formed as veritable history. For no mere invention, or myth, after what had gone before, could have put such words into the mouth of Christ upon the cross. They are his open to the inference that he who was so sure of divine support (when there was less need of it) in the supreme crisis of his fate found that confidence deserting him.

Why should not the wavering mind, almost persuaded to be a christian, say, on reading these words, "~~after all they are~~" Here is a kind of confession! The ~~would~~ professed Messiah, when put to the ultimate proof, found ~~perhaps~~ that he was no Messiah after all; and that his consciousness of oneness with God had vanished like a dream.

Besides, this cry of pain and distress can only be read as an intensely human utterance; and when our gospels were written probably his ~~him~~ followers were already beginning to think of Jesus as one a great deal more than man. It is rather plainly absurd for one who is God in mortal form, to say "My God! why has thou

forsaken me". No man of Paul's time, to be
just this;
sure, could have said, that he was God in mortal
was
form. But he was, then regarded as being so far
above ordinary human kind, that they who spoke of
him, were disposed to see the divine, quite as
much as the human side of his character and life.
the word.
Yet then stood the words in the ~~record~~;
surely an utterance of human weakness and pain,
and quite ready to lend themselves to the suggestion
in effect,
that, at the end, Jesus, confessed his crucifixion to
for if
be just. ~~If~~ in that hour he lost the hand of
with a sign of plausibility,
God, one might say, ~~a part of the~~ his sense of
that losing must have been the consciousness
that he never surely held it.
certain
We may be ~~sure~~ that words like these,
preserved among his few utterances upon
stood for
the cross, are no invention or fable. They ~~are~~
the genuine recollections of an actual scene.
So the prophet of Galilee, put to death by those who
had no understanding of his purpose or his
message, did cry out, with a loud voice, it is said;
dull and suffering.
as one in the extremity of ~~human pain~~.



Whatever was the shadow that fell upon him in that dark hour, it soon passed away. The final words, with which his spirit took its flight from earth, breathe his habitual serenity and calm. If for a time he lost the divine hand that was leading him, and a great horror swept in upon him, he soon found himself once more securely held; for the ~~words~~ last saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," bore in them that same sigh of contentment and peace, with which a babe sinks to rest in its mother's arms.

But for a moment at least, it would seem as if despair must have rolled ~~over~~ over him. Something more than physical anguish is required to account for the cry that rose to his lips. It was rather an agony of soul that overwhelmed him; and if we can interpret ~~that~~ this cry through which it found utterance ~~anguish that~~ we can appreciate the greatest bitterness of the Cross.

For one thing, I think, we should dismiss from our imagination any idea that this great mind, during the

closing scenes of his life on earth, was acting
~~any~~ part; in self glorification, or even for the
sake of setting an human example to his followers.
If, in those pride or fortitude, he had been steeling
his heart to endure all that his enemies might do to
him, resolved not to display weakness in their
sight, he could not have been ignorant how
they would rejoice to hear him say: "My God, why
hast thou forsaken me!" and how surely they would
seize that utterance, as evidence that he was only
an impostor.

But perhaps we are less
capable of considering any kind of theatrical
effect. We have a right to hold that his was the
most genuine life of human history. He had no
part to play, no reputation to maintain; and he
despised all the arts by which men so often contrive
to seem to be, in the eyes of others, something
other than they are.

Every word and deed of his appears to be, rather,
an utterance of his deepest life. He came, he said
to bear witness to the truth: and he was true, in
every act and word and thought. What he does he

Indeed, what he knew he testified, what he felt he spoke; and nowhere does he give us the impression of one who, by hard effort, was holding himself to some ideal way.

His silence in the presence of his accusers and judges means, one may suppose, that he resigned the weakness of speech; and that his mind was for the time most part occupied with that divine Communion to which he had committed the guidance of his way. He really walked this earth, and walked in his depth. I see him, with all the simplicity of a little child: not posing before men in any manner whatever, but living out, fully and freely, that new life which he had found in God.

For the keynote of his whole career was that consciousness of being in God; as God was in him; which somehow came to dominate his whole being. He and his Father were one. He was God's Man. He had no purpose but to do what God required of him; and through him, he was sure, God meant to perform a saving work for the benefit of all mankind. However he arrived at this conviction, there is no mistaking the fact that it is what he did

believe, with all his mind and soul.

Conceive, then, that for a little time, in the midst of that terrible test of endurance, this feeling of confidence departs him! Imagine a little child being led, by an elder hand, though seems that, but for its perfect trust in such guidance, must overwhelm it with fright, and then suppose, where there ought to be turnings, through which it is being conducted, on the very word, that hand is suddenly withdrawn; the guide vanishes, the child stands, for the moment, forsaken, to face with that hideous prospect, undefended and alone!

Something like this seems to me the test in the cup of bitterness which this Lord prayed might not be put to his lips; but which, in obedience to a higher will, he had to drink, if need be, to its very dregs.

If we were to demand, of him who is to them as God now upon earth, and God's life in human flesh, that no doubt of spiritual realities should ever cross his mind, – We ask what, under human conditions is absolutely impossible: We exact a boon which, after we had it would be,

for us men, entirely destitute of meaning. We read the gospel life as before us in such terms that we can know it as real: not as a human phantasm; and the mastery of a contest between flesh and spirit on a precisely such occasion as the first temptation is not a dream.

If the story of Christ's temptation means anything it means that at the very outset of his career there was a last crisis with doubt which, for a time, threatened to overthrow him. Called out of the seclusion of his life of humble toil to undertake a work of deliverance for his people, and for mankind, at first he had to wonder, and question, whether he were not the victim of some illusion. Was it, indeed, the voice of God that had summoned him to this task? How could he prove that a divine power wished him to assume this mission, and would support him through the scenes and trials that must await him! Here was doubt such as the human

mind is obliged to deal with, and command
allegiance to, when it stands on the threshold
of any new and unkind way. No matter how
bright the vision, or how clear the summons has
been, ~~a~~ an inborn and instinctive skepticism of the
mind rises up to ask, "~~a~~ can you not being deluded by
a trick?" The human greatness of Christ consisted,
not in being free from this common experience, but
in recovering, entirely, from that infirmity of will,
which is apt to become chronic in human minds,
He gave his doubts all proper chance to argue
their case. They should have perfectly fair trial
at the bar of reason. And then, when the verdict
went ~~the~~ against them, he simply banished them.

So far as we know they never came back
for an instant, during his active ministry, to disturb
his mental poise and balance. To doubt is human,
no matter how great the life, if it be a mind under
human conditions it has to grapple with that
enemy to its certitude and confidence. But the
great life refuses to be paralyzed by this inward
conflict. It offers its doubts ~~a fair~~ a full opportunity

to establish whatever ~~mysterious~~ they have to set up.
and them if they fail. it leads them ~~them Destiny~~ as if
they had never existed. Instead of allowing them to
~~long about~~ linger in its consciousness, and long like leaden
weights upon every practical move it can make,
it casts them out, and will have no more to do
with them.

In the life of Christ we catch no glimpse
of any further hesitation, or uncertainty. till we
come to the Garden scene after the last Supper.
There, I am sure, he himself has told us the
meaning of the struggle that it cost him to
regain his peace of mind ~~back~~ for his lonely prayer
When he came, and found his disciples
sleeping, he said. "the spirit indeed is willing, but
the flesh is weak." This is certainly said as if
it were an excuse for them; because they had not
shared his vigil. But for more appropriately the
words apply to his own case; as an explanation of
the gloom that had come upon him.

It was his own flesh that rose in rebellion,
when it came close to the trial it must undergo.
The spirit, he was ready for the sacrifice demanded

of him. But mortal flesh said "No! I will not
submit to this indignity." He had long foreseen that
the end of his course was sure to be a violent death,
The plan of his ~~capture~~ enemies had been so definitely formed,
including the teaching of one of his own disciples,
that he was undoubtedly perfectly aware also of the
manner in which he must die.

And when the hour came, though there
was no spiritual wavering, his flesh was weak,
that frailty, also, his indomitable heart had to
take up and carry: as our own burden added to all the
rest. So the Spirit within him did hold up the
shrinking and trembling mortal form: & filling it
again with its own deathless resolution.

And once more, on the cross, perhaps we
~~may~~ reasonably conclude, this inward strife was
briefly renewed. If the words he uttered are any
clue to his inward state of mind: (and, ~~at~~ for
my part, it seems only right thus to retain them)
that must have been the most terrible moment
of his life. Why should that particular prediction
have sprung to his lips? Plenty of language

expression of wrong-ness, and pain, and need,
can be drawn from the same source; and with that
he must have been equally familiar. Why this cry,
as of profoundest spiritual agony. "My God, why hast
thou forsaken me!"

Is it not probable that, for the moment ~~the~~
~~heart~~, something came between him and the vision
by which he had been so long directed and inspired;
that for a little time he was left hanging there in
utter darkness of soul: no ray of Divine certainly
shining into his heart, but only the great welter of
a world, filled with blind fate and meaningless
chance, surrounding him!

I would not seem to suggest that
in this moment God's hand was powerless
with ~~him~~; but rather that clouds
which on
always present in the ~~mental~~ atmosphere of
the mind, and
~~man~~, which he also was forced to discipline, more
than once, in the hour of his great trial
temporarily rolled in upon him, to blot out
the whole light of his life.—

Test and try it when you will the course of this single soul is profoundly illustrative and interpretative of the whole deeper spiritual life of man. It is our common human experience which we here find, all set forth with luminous simplicity; and all played in the light of a divine meaning and purpose in our existence.

Nothing is more characteristic of this life of the soul than those periods of darkness which sometimes obliterate its hope and faith. To the best of us there will come moments when the soul's vision seems ~~nothing but~~ fanciful and unreal; when even the probability of a power of love that we had thought was over us; and of a bright future that we had hoped was before us; vanishes away, and we are left with nothing but a horror of great blackness awaiting us.

What does it signify that the great Son of God himself must pass through some such experience; and how should we deal with such doubts, when they arise in our minds?

It means, simply, that there is an overlooking purpose behind spirit and sense through which

deeper humanity, accomplish its destiny. It means, what the whole history of the world shows us, that the man of sense-perceptions, and the man of spiritual discernment, on former steps; and that neither will entirely accomplish the other's ends. This conflict antagonism runs through all that we do, and all that we are. The perfect life of the spirit could not be shown to us, under human conditions, without showing us the reality, and all the tragic intensity, of this struggle; from which the soul which finds its help in God always emerges victorious.

The strife will take many forms; and will be waged, here or there, through a long train of opposition; where the instincts of the ~~higher~~ sensuous nature and those of the higher spiritual being, stand arrayed against each other. Now ~~and~~ and again, it becomes a fierce combat for the very standards of those characteristic faiths, under which these opposing forces stand grouped. Both in the single life, and in the general life, there may be periods when the spirit

~~sound~~ is clearly supreme, and when the army of sensualism seems driven from the field. But though routed, it is never destroyed; nor cannot be annihilated, while human nature has its home in this nature of flesh. At some moment of weakness, - or when the spiritual nature is off its guard, back comes the surging power of the animal in that is in us all, and down go our spiritual towers in the dust.

The end of the lower physical life is that There is no God, no heaven; nothing for any of us but a brief taste of the delirious joys of existence, and then oblivion. The end of the higher spiritual life is that we are born under the guidance of an eternal goodness, to seek an eternal blessedness; for this purchase of which the cross, with its sacrifice of every earthly good, is seen to bear a price.

We shall never make peace between these two ends, either in ourselves or in the world about us. We cannot convince one side of our being of the reality of the immortal life,

It will never be divorced from the consciousness of the other side of your being that the hope of immortal life is the one thing that makes this life really worth living. Here are the two voices, the two entirely opposite views, that are in us all.

On the wide field of this world's life it must be, with greater or less intensity one continual contest to uphold the noble standards of your being. Social purity cannot be maintained without taking sides in a strife, which will sometimes pour fierce and bitter. In ourselves, the same battle has to be waged: not always nor often, it is to be hoped against the coarser sins of the flesh, but against suggestions which come from the lower nature and are in deadly opposition to that spirit for which the life and example of Christ stand.

Many of the temptations which beset our path, we must think, be never felt or seen. But the root and mother of them all, that creed of sense which holds the life of the spirit a mere illusion; was in him as it is in us. He could not have been more

The "Word" in him could not have made flesh," was not this Jesus.

What happened for a moment on the cross, we may reasonably suppose, was that this black unbelief of our lower physical being rose up with force enough to silence the voice of faith. For the instant he could not hear the voice of God, for the clamor in his ears of the same tempter who had said to him at the beginning "If thou be the Son of God."

"If!" The suggestion was of course "You are not the Son of God. You only think you are." The same suggestion comes to us: "You are not God's child, and you have no immortal future!" "This is only your vain and foolish hope."

But this thought, even when it staggers us, means no more than as if a blow from some outside source had suddenly stunned us into unconsciousness.

We no longer believe in a personal devil who whispers such thoughts to us, yet we cannot face the facts of our

moral being without believing in a kind of second personality, within us, which plays that same role. Always there is that other second man locked up with our own self in the same breast. He is never wholly defeated, however we may hold him in subjection; and sometimes his mocking voice is the one sound that rings through the chambers of the soul.

He is not so much an immoral as an utterly unmoral being, and to him the highest values of our existence are nothing but moonshine. There is no discredit to any of us in having to do battle with that antagonist. It is no impeachment of the spiritual consciousness of our moral master of the life of this soul, if, for a little time, the demon of sense-perception held possession of his heart against its rightful occupant. That is what life here on earth is: a contest between the lower powers which are grounded

the earth alone, and that new "man from heaven", who knows himself the Son of God.

In all the annals of our race the supreme and typical instance of this spiritual being, walking here triumphant and strong, is given us in the immortal picture of the life of Jesus ~~the~~ of Nazareth; and at no point of his career was this victory of the spirit over the flesh more shining, or significant, than in its closing scene. It could not have been a god-victory had there not been a real foe to conquer; the foe which besets the whole pathway of our human existence; that unbelieving part of human nature which holds every high ideal to be nothing but an "undiscovered dream."

We, also, on former days must that hand enemy to our peace and hope. If he showed one wholly triumph over our civilization the world could only go a downward ~~road~~ road. But he could triumph. Thanks to this work which Christ has done in the hearts of men

the spirit is now too strong for the flesh. We may be sure that the allow of man's faith in the eternal and the immortal will never be removed. And so often as the ship comes back upon our heart we may call to mind that wondrous figure on the cross, crying out in anguish of soul greater than the bodily pain, which he had endured without a murmur, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

This too, we may say, the very kind of life was obliged to pass through. How can I hope to be exempt? But as for him, the mortal himself soon passed away, and it was immediately given him to enter the gloring of the new world, holding fast in pain and trial the hand of his heavenly guide; so it may be with us.

We also can find, as the cloud passes, that the stars above us are undimmed, and as the years go on we should gather a growing confidence that these lights of heaven are real. It is the mists of time and sense that pass and fade. The hope of man's heart, and the word of man's God, will stand forever.